

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SOCIALIST LABOR FEDERATION STAGES MAJOR ANTI-
GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATION IN BRUSSELS

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SUMMARY. SOCIALIST FGFB TRADE UNION FEDERATION MARCHED SCORES
OF THOUSANDS OF FAITHFUL THROUGH BRUSSELS STREETS MARCH 13 IN
ANTI-GOVERNMENT RALLY WHICH WAS BIGGEST POLITICAL DEMONSTRATION
IN SEVERAL YEARS IN BELGIUM. FGFB RALLY WAS INTENDED PRIMARILY
AS A SHOW OF SOCIALIST TRADE UNION STRENGTH, NOT FOCUSED ON A
SPECIFIC ISSUE OR DEMAND. HENCE IT POSED NO IMMEDIATE THREAT TO
TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT EXISTENCE. MAIN IMMEDIATE SIGNIFICANCE OF
FGFB RALLY WAS TO HIGHLIGHT FEDERATION AND ITS PRESIDENT DEBUNNE
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AS BELL-WETHER OF TINDEMAN'S OPPOSITION. CHRISTIAN PEOPLES

PARTY (CVP) OF PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS HELD MINI-CONVENTION ON SAME DAY IN GHENT AT WHICH CONFIDENT PARTY LEADERS ANNOUNCED PLANS FOR AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN TO ENHANCE THE PARTY'S POWER IN OCTOBER COMMUNAL ELECTIONS. CVP PRESIDENT MARTENS CALLED FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF A EUROPE-WIDE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY WITH TINDEMANS AS FIRST LEADER. END SUMMARY

1. SOCIALIST FGTB LABOR FEDERATION, REPRESENTING ROUGHLY ONE-HALF OF BELGIAN ORGANIZED LABOR, STAGED LARGEST POLITICAL DEMONSTRATION IN LAST HALF-DOZEN YEARS IN BRUSSELS MARCH 13. SOMETHING LIKE 70-80,000 ORDERLY MARCHERS, BROUGHT IN 33 SPECIAL TRAINS FROM ALL OVER BELGIUM, CONVERGED ON DOWNTOWN PLACE ROGIER IN A DEMONSTRATION OF FGTB POLITICAL POWER RANGED AGAINST THE BOURGEOIS GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER LEO TINDEMANS. (THE POLICE COUNT WAS 45,000, THE FGTB COUNT 100,000 - BOTH WELL OFF THE MARK, ACCORDING TO DISPASSIONATE HEAD-COUNTERS.)

2. SLOGANS OF THE DAY WERE "JOBS FOR ALL" AND "MAINTENANCE OF LABOR'S PURCHASING POWER". BUT THE REAL PURPOSE WAS NOT TO FOCUS PUBLIC ATTENTION ON SPECIFIC DEMANDS BUT TO PRODUCE AN IMPRESSIVE DEMONSTRATION OF OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES. WHILE SOCIALIST PARTY CO-PRESIDENTS WILLY CLAES AND ANDRE COOLS, AS WELL AS OTHER SENIOR SOCIALIST OFFICIALS, WERE PRESENT, IT WAS ENTIRELY AN FGTB SHOW WITH FEDERATION PRESIDENT GEORGES DEBUNNE DELIVERING THE KEY SPEECH. DEBUNNE'S SPEECH WAS A CRY OF DEFIANCE TO THE GOVERNMENT ("THEY SHALL NOT BRING LABOR TO ITS KNEES") AND A DEMAND FOR STRUCTURAL REFORMS OF BELGIAN SOCIETY ACCORDING TO SOCIALIST PRINCIPLES.

3. FGTB DEMONSTRATORS WERE ORDERLY, GOOD-HUMORED AND GAVE NO PROBLEMS TO POLICE OR PROPERTY OWNERS ALONG THE LINE OF MARCH. SOME MILITANTS FROM THE RIVAL CHRISTIAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION (CSC) JOINED IN. BUT CSC AS AN ORGANIZATION OSTENTATIOUSLY SAT THIS ONE OUT, UNDERLINING THE BREAK IN BELGIUM'S ONCE-UNITED LABOR FRONT OCCASIONED PRIMARILY BY THE CURRNT ALIENATION OF THE SOCIALIST AND CHRISTIAN PARTIS.

4. WHILE DEBUNNE PLAYED THE ROLE OF MR. OPPOSITION IN BRUSSELS STREETS, TINDEMANS' CHRISTIAN PEOPLES PARTY (CVP) WAS HOLDING A MINI-CONVENTION IN GHENT TO CONCERT STRATEGY FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE NATIONWIDE COMMUNAL ELECTIONS IN OCTOBER. SPEAKING WITH RESTRAINT AND DISCLAIMING ANY CVP AMBITION TO BECOME A "TRIUMPHALIST" PARTY, CVP PRESIDENT WILFRIED MARTENS NEVERTHE LESS SIGNALLED AN UNCOMPROMISING DRIVE TO EXTEND THE AUTHORITY OF THE DOMINANT PARTY IN THE TINDEMANS COALITION.

5. MARTENS ANNOUNCED THE PARTY WOULD FOREGO THE CUSTOMARY LOCAL ALLIANCES (MANY HERETOFORE WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY) AND RUN CVP

CANDIDATES ALONE IN ALL 309 COMMUNES IN FLANDERS. SPEAKING CONFIDENTLY OF THE PARTY'S LONGER-TERM GOALS, MARTENS CALLED UPON THE 1,000 CVP DELEGATES TO START MAKING A RECORD NOW FOR THE 1978 NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. IN HIS ONE FORAY INTO INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, MARTENS CALLED FOR THE FORMATION OF A EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND PROPOSED TINDEMANS AS ITS FIRST HEAD.

6. IN A BRIEF ADDRESS TINDEMANS UNCHARACTERISTICALLY TOOK A HARD SWIPE AT ANTI-GOVERNMENT LABOR. THE COUNTRY WOULD BE FURTHER ALONG TOWARD RECOVERY, HE SAID, IF FGFB HAD NOT OBSTRUCTED ENACTMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC STIMULATION PROGRAM (STILL BOGGED DOWN IN PARLIAMENT). PRIM MINISTER SAVED HIS STERNEST WORDS, HOWEVER, FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE FRENCH-LANGAGE NATIONAL TV PROGRAM WHO SHUT DOWN THE CHANNEL FOR ONE HOUR FRIDAY EVENING IN A DEMONSTRATION OF LEFTIST, ANTI-GOVERNMENT SENTIMENT IN THE ENTERPRISE. TINDEMANS, CALLED UPON PARLIAMENT TO ADOPT MEASURES TO MAKE IMPOSSIBLE REPETITION OF "ABUSE" OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTION BY EMPLOYEES FOR PARTISAN POLITICAL PURPOSES. END UNCLASSIFIED

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COMMENT. FGFB AFFAIR IN BRUSSELS WAS AN UNMISTAKABLE DEMONSTRATION OF FGFB'S ABILITY TO ARLLY SOCIALIST TRADE UNIONISTS TO THE CAUSE - AND TO THE POLLS ON ANY GIVEN ELECTION DAY. WHILE IT WAS THE BIGGEST POLITICAL MANIFESTATION IN BELGIUM IN THIS DECADE, DEBUNNE CHOSE NOT TO POSE A DIRECT POLITICAL CHALLENGE TO THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT. HENCE IMMEDIATE IMPACT IN THE POLITICAL ARENA IS NOT LIKELY. AS CVP MEETING IN GHENT DEMONSTRATED, TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT, TAKING COMFORT IN REFUSAL OF CSC TO JOIN ITS SOCIALIST BRETHERN, FEELS FREE TO CONCENTRATE ITS ATTENTION ON OCTOBER COMMUNAL ELECTIONS. PROBABLY MOST SIGNIFICANT SHORT-TERM CONSEQUENCE OF FGFB RALLY WAS THE HIGHLIGHTING OF GEORGES - LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEBUNNE AS A SPOKESMAN FOR TINDEMANS' OPPOSITION. IT WAS AN FGFB SHOW THROUGHOUT WITH CLAES AND COOLS NOT EVEN ALLOWED TO THE MICROPHONE TO OFFER FRATERNAL GREETINGS. WITH RESPECT TO THE SOCIALIST PARTY-FGFB CONNECTION, MR BEGUNNE DEMONSTRATED ON SATURDAY WHICH, IN HIS JUDGMENT, SHOULD BE THE DOG AND WHICH THE TAIL. FIRESTONE

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